

Mindset, Structure, Skills:
Enhanced Company Operations (ECO) and Hybrid War

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Today, a change in the nature of warfare, a continued requirement to project forces ashore, and the realities of the "Long War" have converged to present challenges and opportunities. *A Concept for Enhanced Company Operations* describes one way the Marine Corps is responding to this environment by focusing on the development of capabilities at the company level.¹ Already at the company level, "Savvy company commanders and their Marines make [Enhanced Company Operations] happen, but they do so more often in spite of than because of institutional support."² The Commandant's challenge for enhanced company operations is to "take it to the next level."³ Taking it to the next level means going beyond providing the equipment to make Enhanced Company Operations happen. The keys to success will be developing a light infantry mindset, flexible structures, and people with the right education and skills required for infantry to succeed in the complex environment that will define warfare in the coming decades.

¹ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. *A Concept for Enhanced Company Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 28 August 2008).

² Col Vincent J. Goulding Jr., USMC (Ret.). "Enhanced Company Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 92, No. 8 (August 2008), 18.

³ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. *A Concept for Enhanced Company Operations*.

Enhanced Company Operations Defined

The concept of Enhanced Company Operations developed from a series of experiments focused on the realities of small units operating widely dispersed on the modern battlefield.⁴ Through experimentation and feedback from recent combat operations over the past few years, the Marine Corps has concluded that the company is the smallest tactical unit capable of "sustained independent operations."⁵ Currently, Enhanced Company Operations is only a concept - it is not yet firmly defined. The definition of Enhanced Company Operations will evolve as the Marine Corps defines and refines what it expects an Enhanced Company to do. For discussion purposes, Enhanced Company Operations can be defined as sustained independent operations undertaken by company-sized units specially reinforced to conduct those operations. Consequently, an Enhanced Company is a unit that has been reinforced with some additional capability not found in the basic Marine Rifle Company organization (e.g. specially trained personnel, equipment, additional funds, etc.) to allow it to conduct sustained independent operations.

⁴ Col Vincent J. Goulding Jr., USMC (Ret.). "DO- More Than Two Words," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 92, No. 4 (April 2008), 77-78. And Goulding, "Enhanced Company Operations," 18-19.

⁵ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. *A Concept for Enhanced Company Operations*.

The Hybrid Threat and The Complex Environment

In the Marine Corps' *Vision & Strategy 2025*, "hybrid warfare" is presented as the current and future security environment. Hybrid warfare presents a challenge in that Marines may have to fight conventionally armed state militaries and simultaneously face irregular, terrorist, criminal, or other threats. Compounding this challenge is the fact that conflicts are likely to occur "at great distance from our shores" and in complex, densely populated areas.⁶

Classic Light Infantry: A Mindset, Not a Weight

An infantry unit capable of sustained independent operations is fundamentally a light infantry force in the classic sense. Marines take pride in being "light" and expeditionary, defining light as a matter of weight and operational mobility. Marines actually fight as line infantry, meaning that infantry is closely tied to supporting arms controlled by higher headquarters and limited in tactical

⁶ Headquarters, United States Marine Corps. *Vision and Strategy 2025* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, undated, accessed 18 December 2008 at www.quantico.usmc.mil/activities/?Section=SVG), 18-24.

mobility by the need to retain control of key lines of communication for sustainment.⁷

Light infantry is distinguished by tactical agility, rather than weight. This agility allows light infantry to operate independently of the line or main body, with a high degree of tactical mobility (virtually unlimited by terrain). Independence and mobility allow the light infantry to exercise a great deal of initiative. The light infantry has enough supporting arms organically or in direct support to enable it to support its own maneuver. Equipment is kept to the essentials to reduce consumption rates and allow the light infantry to operate away from lines of communication for at least a period of a few days. Ambush and infiltration are the tactical hallmarks of the light infantry.⁸

Historical Models of Light Infantry Employment

The history of light infantry in modern warfare provides the potential templates for Enhanced Companies and the relationships with higher headquarters and adjacent units. Light infantry has historically been employed in four ways

⁷ Stephen L. Canby. *Classic Light Infantry and New Technology*. Arlington, VA: Defense Advanced Research Project Agency, 1983.

⁸ *Light Infantry*. A draft manual describing the concept of light infantry and its application in 4th Generation Warfare, dated September 2008 (www.d-n-i.net/dni/strategy-and-force-employment/fourth-generation-warfare-manuals/, accessed 15 October 2008).

- 1) Small units (battalion or below) of light infantry employed at great range from the main body (not mutually supporting)
- 2) Specialized light infantry unit (battalion or below) organic to a larger force, operating in support of the larger force and usually within easy range of mutual support
- 3) Light infantry as a larger, independent unit (battalion or higher), usually operating beyond mutual support
- 4) The division of a homogeneous unit into specialized, task organized units (some of which are light infantry) based on the mission and situation

Picking a Model: All of the Above

Picking a "playbook" of models will help define the extent of the development the Marine Corps will need to take Enhanced Companies "to the next level." Not every company need be an Enhanced Company. The ongoing process of experimentation and operational feedback will continue to add to the existing company's capabilities - thereby raising the baseline. Enhanced Companies are then measured against the new baseline. As doctrine, tactics, and technology mature, some of the

capabilities and roles for Enhanced Companies may spread to regular companies as well and raise the baseline, pushing Enhanced Companies to continue to develop and become more capable to retain their different status.

To develop Enhanced Company capabilities when needed, the Marine Corps should educate and staff one company per battalion and all of the companies of one battalion in every regiment. With allocation of equipment and specialist personnel, these companies become Enhanced Companies. A separate set of tasks in the Training and Readiness Manual should be established for Enhanced Companies to facilitate their training prior to deployment. If it became necessary to have more than the available Enhanced Companies for a mission, the allocation of equipment and specialist personnel to other infantry companies (or artillery, light armored reconnaissance, combat service support, etc. if desired), along with a significant training period (likely the equivalent of a six-month MEU workup) would result in the qualification of additional Enhanced Companies.

A battalion should be able to field up to five Enhanced Companies organically, and command more in independent operations. Currently, a battalion has three rifle companies, one weapons company, and a headquarters company. A battalion of Enhanced Companies would contain five company sized units, each

capable of being employed as Enhanced Companies. This would require a restructuring, a redistribution of infantrymen from the rifle companies to the headquarters, or a choice to employ headquarters company Marines as rifle platoons. To command the battalion, the battalion staff would co-locate with one company, building off the company operations and intelligence cells to command and control the battalion. Other staff elements and attachments, such as sustainment units, would also co-locate with this company.

The dispersion of assets to the company level may remove the need for the battalion level of command in some operations—company commanders would work directly for the regimental or MEU commander. Enhanced Companies could also form the nucleus of a Security Cooperation Marine Air-Ground Task Force, operating from a single, small amphibious ship, high-speed vessel, littoral combat ship, or several landing craft. One of these enhanced companies may be detached and working directly for a force, component, or theater commander. The battalion commander would be responsible before deployment for task organizing and training his Enhanced Companies, with a minimum headquarters element and staff, reaching back to the regimental level for maintenance and supply support. If not essential for maintaining command and control in an area during operations,

then the battalion staff should be folded into the Regimental or MEU staff. The battalion commander would remain responsible for mentorship and supervision of the company commanders. Battalion staff members and headquarters company personnel not detached into Enhanced Companies would be folded into the higher level staff.

If operating as an independent battalion (in a light infantry fashion), the battalion staff would co-locate their command post with one of the Enhanced Companies. A detachment from the regimental staff could be provided to enable the battalion to operate independently (i.e. communications, maintenance, etc.).

Elements of all four models are in the example organization. Selecting the command relationship, flexibly task organizing, "task arming," and task equipping for a mission will allow the Enhanced Company to bring the right capability to bear.

The Irregular Warfare Capability Gap: An Opportunity and An Organizing Principle

The 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review* stated that U.S. forces were well prepared and structured for conventional warfare, but were “not as well organized, trained, educated, or equipped for protracted [Irregular Warfare (IW)] on a global scale.”⁹ This gap is an opportunity for the Marine Corps to employ Enhanced Companies (in addition to and in concert with other initiatives such as Marine Special Operations Command and Security Cooperation Marine Air-Ground Task Forces) to bring needed capability and capacity to the joint IW fight for the Long War.

To confront the challenges of Irregular Warfare, the Marine Corps and the U.S. Special Operations Command developed the *Multi-Service Concept for Irregular Warfare*. This document lists the six logical lines of operation for the majority of campaigns: Information Operations, Providing Essential Services, Training and Equipping (or Developing) Local Forces, Combat Operations, Governance, and Economic Development.¹⁰ The Enhanced Company would be expected to be strongest in combat operations (conducted with a light infantry mindset). At least 10-15 Infantrymen from the enhanced company should be trained and

⁹ Kenneth C. Coons, Jr. and Glenn M. Harned. “Irregular Warfare Is Warfare,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 52 (1st Quarter, 2009), 98.

¹⁰ U.S. Marine Corps Combat Development Command and U.S. Special Operations Command Center for Knowledge and Futures, *Multi-Service Concept for Irregular Warfare* (Quantico, VA and MacDill AFB, FL, August 2006), 12.

educated to be very proficient in training and working with local forces. This allows the Enhanced Company to multiply its reach and combat power greatly through the integration of local forces. Leaders and several personnel should be trained and educated so that the Enhanced Company is proficient in information operations. At least one person each with experience in providing essential services, governance, and economic development is required to help the commander develop solutions in these areas using local resources. More importantly, these personnel must have the know-how to integrate other MAGTF resources, joint and interagency resources, as well as local, international, and non-governmental resources to achieve results along their respective lines of operation.

In addition to the personnel and skills needed to succeed along the six lines of operation in IW, the Enhanced Company needs people aggressively selected for their ability to operate independently and adapt quickly to changing situations (a light infantry mindset). These people will be able to make the adaptations necessary to succeed in complex environments. Previous experimentation recognized the difficulty in training personnel, particularly at the squad leader level, for success in a distributed environment. The Marine Corps must study and revise personnel policies in order to remove the obstacles to

training junior leaders, such as frequent personnel shifts. In addition, the right training must be added to training and education programs to provide the right skill sets to the enhanced company.

Enhanced Companies will need to organize company headquarters with operations and intelligence cells capable of command and control of sustained operations. The company in many environments will need personnel authorized to purchase local supplies and reduce the unit footprint and external sustainment needs. As needed, the company should be reinforced-organized with any combination of medium mortars, heavy mortars, artillery, heavy machine guns, vehicles (anything from local vehicles to light tactical vehicles to armored personnel carriers) and the personnel to sustain those vehicles, and any other support needed for the mission.

The Enhanced Company and the Conventional Threat

An Enhanced Company might be expected to have some of its conventional, line infantry fighting skills atrophy while focusing on all of the other tasks required of an Enhanced Company. However, this doesn't have to happen. Providing personnel stability for Enhanced Companies allows them to reach

a level of proficiency in conventional operations and sustain that level while training for Enhanced Company Operations.

Light Infantry alone should not be expected to confront all conventional threats. Enhanced Companies operating in a light infantry fashion should be employed in a combined arms manner to complement the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of other arms. The tactical repertoire and light infantry mindset allow the Enhanced Company to collaborate with heavy forces to place the enemy in a dilemma by operating effectively to deny close terrain to the enemy, or by conducting ambushes to delay and attrite an attacking enemy in order to allow heavy forces to finish the enemy.

Conclusion

With the right mindset, flexible structures adapted to the situation, and skilled personnel, Enhanced Company Operations can give the Marine Corps a powerful doctrinal tool to stay relevant in all environments. The Marine Corps has a light infantry history and experience operating in a widely dispersed manner. Remaining in touch with this history and the history of light infantry will help to illuminate the requirements for Enhanced Companies as the concept matures and the Marine Corps truly "takes it to the next level."

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